

# NASA News



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## **NASA'S NEW SUBORBITAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY DEDICATION SET**

Minority students will now have a new avenue for education and career opportunities through a unique partnership between NASA and New Mexico State University.

NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, VA., and New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M., will hold a dedication ceremony for the nation's only Suborbital Center of Excellence on April 24. The Center is a component of the New Mexico Aerospace Institute and will be dedicated to the improvement of minority student education and career opportunities, with a focus on suborbital science and engineering opportunities.

"This is an exciting endeavor that will sponsor outreach programs for students in kindergarten through the post-graduate level and will provide them with a better understanding of NASA's programs," said Bernice Merritt, Balloon Program Office Business Manager at Wallops.

The mission of the Suborbital Center of Excellence (SCE) is to promote science and engineering education and outreach, with the objective of increasing the number of college graduates who have an interest in suborbital programs as a career choice. The SCE will be dedicated to the improvement of education for minorities focusing on engineering disciplines relevant to suborbital programs.

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Through a \$700,000, three-year grant from NASA, New Mexico State University's Physical Science Laboratory (PSL) will establish and operate the Center and team with the Science Education Alliance, a nonprofit organization, to develop projects for public school students. The Center will sponsor student research projects at NMSU, support student co-op positions at NASA Wallops Flight Facility, provide grants to faculty members who involve students in relevant research and promote projects in secondary and elementary schools.

"To us, it was a good match", said Steve Smith, Chief of NASA's Balloon Program Office. "We have had a very close partnership with New Mexico State and PSL for a long time and we're looking for a university environment because that's where our nation's future scientists and engineers will come from."

New Mexico State University, a Hispanic Serving Institution, has a strong relationship with NASA through participation in the Scientific Balloon Program by the University's Physical Science Laboratory (PSL), the Sounding Rocket Program and the Space Grant Consortium. PSL operates NASA's Scientific Balloon Facility in Palestine, Texas, and also is involved in NASA's suborbital sounding rocket program.

"Suborbital programs include high-altitude scientific balloons, sounding rockets that are launched into the upper atmosphere for scientific research, uninhabited aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other aircraft," said PSL's Steve Hottman, who will serve as Director of the Center.

Two industry leaders in the suborbital field, Southwest Research Institute of San Antonio and Raven Industries of Sulphur Springs, Texas, will help the Center develop its programs. "We are seeking strategic partnerships with other aerospace companies and government agencies", said Hottman.

For further information on NASA's Scientific Balloon Program, visit the Wallops web site at:

<http://www.wff.nasa.gov>

For further information on New Mexico State University visit:

<http://www.nmsu.edu>